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*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 06BOGOTA555, HARDBALL POLITICS BEGIN IN COLOMBIA'S ELECTION

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06BOGOTA555**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BOGOTA555	2006-01-23 14:32	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Bogota

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.elespectador.com/wikileaks>

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

231432Z Jan 06

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 000555

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/20/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: HARDBALL POLITICS BEGIN IN COLOMBIA'S ELECTION  
SEASON

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood  
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

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Summary  
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1. (C) Colombia's election season is in full swing, with all sides playing political hardball and displaying no sign of letting up. Pro-Uribe parties expelled 5 candidates from party lists recently, apparently because of their paramilitary links, and additional expulsions from all parties (including the Liberals, who expelled one of their own) would not be surprising. Pro-Uribe "Partido de la U" leader Juan Manuel Santos launched a serious attack on Liberal Senator Rafael Pardo, accusing him of illegitimate and possibly illegal FARC contacts aimed at defeating Uribe; the President's spokesperson later confirmed the allegations and said they had forwarded them to the Prosecutor General for further investigation. Peace Commissioner Restrepo summarized the evidence the Uribe Administration claimed to have against Pardo, and it does not amount to much (hearsay and a mysterious CD that no one appears to have seen), but Uribe's Communications Director Jaime Bermudez insisted the information warranted the prosecutor's attention. Pardo consistently and categorically denied the allegations and accused Uribe of playing dirty. (On January 22 Uribe apologized to Pardo and said he was withdrawing the allegations against him.) Curiously, the dispute has not resulted in a closing of the pro- and anti-Uribe ranks, as leading Liberal Party presidential candidate Horacio Serpa has been silent (and is apparently annoyed at Liberal leader Gaviria's vocal support for Pardo in the dispute) and pro-Uribe leader of the "Cambio Radical" party, German Vargas

Lleras, distanced himself from the initial Santos attack.  
End summary.

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Uribista Parties Announce Expulsions for Paramilitary Links  
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12. (C) In an unusual joint press conference January 17, Juan Manuel Santos and German Vargas Lleras, leaders respectively of the pro-Urube "Partido de la U" (the U Party) and of "Cambio Radical" (Radical Change), announced they had removed from their legislative lists five candidates running for election in the March Congressional poll: three candidates from the U Party (DiebMaloof - Magdalena; HabibMerheg - Risaralda; and Luis Eduardo Vives - Magdalena) and two from Cambio Radical (Jorge Castro - Magdalena; and Jorge Caballero - Magdalena). Santos told polcouns that he had previously removed two unnamed candidates from the U Party list. Neither Santos nor Vargas Lleras announced the reasons for the removal, but all five candidates dismissed on January 17 are widely regarded as having paramilitary links. The expulsions came shortly before a new Electoral Tribunal created by the Electoral Guarantees Law was to begin its work in scrutinizing the conduct of campaigns and candidates.

13. (C) Immediately following the joint press conference, pro-Urube Senator Mario Uribe (the president's cousin) said his "Colombia Democratica" (Democratic Colombia) party had already accepted Merheg into its ranks and had not yet heard of requests from the other dismissed candidates but would consider them if received. He was forced to back down within hours after the president's spokesperson announced that any party accepting the expelled candidates would automatically disqualify themselves from being considered part of the president's team.

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Gaviria Says Expulsions Limited, Throws Out Liberal  
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14. (C) Liberal party leader and former president Cesar Gaviria told D/polcouns January 19 the expulsions were welcome but limited to candidates from the Magdalena region and its environs, which he said was "territory of narcotrafficker Jorge 40." In Gaviria's view, Santos and Vargas Lleras made a hasty announcement because they feared that the Liberals were about to denounce the Magdalena paramilitary links of the candidates concerned (Gaviria said he was in fact about to make the announcement). Gaviria said there are much worse situations involving uribista candidates with paramilitary links in Cordoba, for example, and he expected further expulsions from pro-Urube ranks. Gaviria praised the statement from the president's campaign that Uribe would not permit his allies to accept expelled candidates, but argued that Uribe would have had much more impact if he had made the statement personally rather than have it delivered through a spokesperson. According to Gaviria, Mario Uribe's CambioDemocratico party list for Congress "is full of narcos and paras, it's a mafia list." Gaviria asked rhetorically how the president could permit support of this nature and said the Liberals would make more of the issue in the coming weeks.

15. (C) Gaviria had party problems of his own to deal with as he announced on January 18 that he had removed sitting Liberal Senator Vicente BlelSaad from the Liberal Party Senate list, following press allegations linking Blel to narcotics trafficking charges facing others in the U.S. Gaviria told D/polcouns that Blel met with him January 19 to protest his removal but was not overly forceful in doing so. (Gaviria also said he had received no calls from Liberals protesting the decision to remove Blel.) Gaviria said he was unaware of Liberals with paramilitary links on party lists, but insisted they would be removed immediately if such people existed. Gaviria admitted that there were "probably" Liberal candidates with links to different kinds of criminality, and said he would get rid of them as soon as any information came to light.

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The Rafael Pardo Affair  
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16. (C) In a somewhat bizarre twist, U Party leader Santos responded to a media question at the January 17 press conference by saying he was aware of information linking Liberal Party presidential candidate (and former Defense Minister under Gaviria) Rafael Pardo to an attempt to forge an unspecified electoral alliance with the FARC to ensure Uribe's reelection defeat. Santos said the information would be forwarded to the prosecutor general for further investigation. (Cambio Radical leader Vargas Lleras declined to associate himself with the Santos statement at the press conference; Gaviria told D/polcouns January 19 the media question was planted.) Later that evening, a presidency spokesperson released a statement confirming Santos's information. On January 19, Uribe's Communications Director

Jaime Bermudez told polcouns Uribe was fed up with Gaviria's and Pardo's attacks on the peace process with the AUC and on the Justice and Peace law in Europe and the U.S. Now that they had come into possession of "serious information" regarding Pardo, Bermudez said, it was time for the public to hear "both sides." (Gaviria told D/polcouns the Uribe campaign's attack on Pardo was motivated by anger at Pardo's campaign against the Justice and Peace process.) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo said the GOC's proof of the Pardo allegations amounted to two statements to Restrepo personally, one by an unidentified person whose family member is held by the FARC, and one by an unidentified GOC interlocutor with the FARC. According to Restrepo, the sum of the statements is that Pardo sent a CD to the FARC requesting a meeting with them and outlining the importance of defeating Uribe. Restrepo said he knew the identities of the informants but would not release them publicly for security reasons. Restrepo did not say he had seen or listened to the CD.

17. (C) Pardo has consistently and categorically denied the allegations of FARC contact, including minutes after Restrepo's statement. He said there is no such proposal for a meeting or electoral arrangement with the FARC, either on CD, DVD, video, or in writing. Gaviria said Pardo assured him there was no truth to the allegations. Gaviria accused Uribe January 18 of threatening democracy by authorizing the attacks on Pardo.

18. (C) On January 22 Uribe apologized to Pardo, withdrew the allegations against him, and asked for a private meeting with the Senator. Pardo accepted the apology but declined the meeting, saying a cloud remained over his name because Uribe said he would withdraw the allegations only because he could not ensure the alleged witnesses came forward, not because the allegations were false. Press commentaries January 23 said Peace Commissioner Restrepo declined to supply Uribe with the names of the witnesses and instead offered his resignation, which Uribe declined to accept.

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Comment  
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19. (C) The political spats of the last few days mark the real start of Colombia's hardball election season. Presidential advisor Fabio Echeverri told the Ambassador January 19 that the campaigns will be tough and negative. We would not be surprised to see additional expulsions, from all parties, since a number of professional politicians or would-be politicians are tainted with illegal or questionable activities of some sort. With regard to the allegations against Rafael Pardo, Uribe had to apologize and withdraw them, apparently because he could not persuade Restrepo to supply the names of the witnesses. Uribe was faced with crafting an apology that saved face and kept his Peace Commissioner in place. Most commentators, including Pardo's opponents, have regarded the allegations as unlikely. Curiously, the Pardo affair has not resulted in a closing of the pro- and anti-Uribe ranks. Leading Liberal presidential candidate Horacio Serpa has been silent, and is apparently annoyed that Gaviria has rushed so eagerly to Pardo's defense. For his part, prominent pro-Uribe leader of Cambio Radical, German Vargas Lleras (and Juan Manuel Santos's principal rival), has kept his distance from the attacks on Pardo.

WOOD